

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and thank you for this opportunity to speak before the Appropriations Committee. My name is James Marchand and I am a product of Connecticut's public schools grades K through PhD. I am a 40 year veteran of working in and for public schools in Connecticut and I am currently the president of the Odyssey Community School's Board of Trustees where formally I was the Education Director.

I guess you can say that I entered public school at age five and never left.

Since its inception, Odyssey Community School truly represents what charter schools are expected to do and accomplish. It has achieved an equal balance between white and minority students; we are about 53% minority enrollment at last count. Odyssey has evolved its curriculum and the delivery of that curriculum to the point where it has virtually eliminated the achievement gap among its students. Students enrolling in grade four at Odyssey and who remain with us through grade eight, will collectively move from 53% proficiency or greater in Math and a 41% proficiency or greater in Reading to 90% proficiency or greater in both Math and Reading. By adding grades Kindergarten through grade 3, making us a K through 8 school, just think how much more we can teach our students and how much higher their achievement levels will be.

In addition to study skills and habits, Odyssey also pays a great deal of attention to the development of our students character, confidence and sense of community. We do this through integrating our CIRCLE values into everything we do. Our CIRCLE values are simple yet profound; they are Courage, Integrity, Respect, Curiosity, Leadership and Excellence. We use these values to instill in our students those skills most necessary for learning and relating to others.

It is only through the self sacrifice of a talented and committed staff that we have been able to accomplish such success. I know times are tough all over, but three years without any increase in per pupil expenditure has made it doubly tough for Odyssey to survive. Given that the per pupil expenditure is already dramatically below the state average makes our achievements even more amazing.

So, with all this said, we think Odyssey is a school that is right on target for where we want public education to be to be in Connecticut and what we want public education to accomplish. Our hope is that we can remain in business so we can share our success story with others and help point the way to where we all want to be. Your help and support will help us make this hope a reality..

Thank you.